

### Hazards of butterfly collecting – tribal life in Hermel, Lebanon, 1972

The semi-deserts of Hermel, way north of Baalbek in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley, with the tall, snow-clad Lebanon and Amtilebanon ranges on either side, clearly deserved a visit. Here was a real chance of getting some of the special arid zone species of the Syrian and Jordanian deserts, not yet recorded from Lebanon, especially *Euchloe falloui* Allard, one or two of the genus *Tarucus* Moore, and perhaps *Syrichtus poggei* Lederer. But most of all, I had my sights set on the beautiful *Zegris eupheme* Esper, with its disjunct distribution in Spain and North Africa, and again in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The Hermel district, unfortunately, was not stable during my time in Lebanon. The area was tribal, much given to blood-feuding during most of the year, except when there was too much snow and during the brief spring agricultural season, when the hashish fields had to be tended. The government of President Franjeh – perhaps one of the most improbable heads of state quasi-democracy has ever thrown up – had decided to force an end to blood-feuds by military means, in order to enforce the “law of the land” throughout the country. At times even the air force was used.

This is not a culturally sensitive way of going about social change. Blood-feuding was part of the traditional pattern, and all residents in the area promptly united to oppose the government – physically – to enforce their right to kill each other in time-honoured fashion. Blood-feuding could be resumed in good time.

Nonetheless, I made arrangements to go, a local doctor promising to put us up and give us a guide. Beirutis know little about – and care less for – the tribals in Hermel. Our friends were horrified to hear of our plans; few thought they would ever see us again.

We were well received by the Soviet-trained doctor, with whom conversation was only possible in broken French, and discussed where to go next day, as well as local customs, over a delicious meal of lemon chicken. Suddenly shooting broke out – and the doctor was called away to treat a casualty. A vivid introduction to daily life in Hermel.

The next day we explored the banks of the Orontes river, clad in the emerald green of spring, in contrast to the desolate desert and bare mountain flanks. We found a thriving colony of *Tarucus balkanicus* Freyer and many other interesting things. At the end of the day I am almost sure I saw *Zegris eupheme*; without catching it I did not include it in my book (1974. *Butterflies of Lebanon*. CNRS, Beirut). I have since seen the species in the Atlas Mountains and in the Jordan Valley; I am now sure that this was what it was.

That evening the doctor insisted that we go up the mountains to a village inhabited exclusively by people for whom an arrest-warrant for murder had been issued. Here were supposedly butterflies, but we were also to check on

reports that previously unknown cuneiform rock inscriptions had been found. We would be issued with a bodyguard.

Off we went at the crack of dawn, with a huge "minder", armed with a Kalashnikov, a shotgun, and a pistol. Could I please keep the latter in the glove-compartment till we had passed the army check-point (pistols being illegal, rifles not)? I wondered how to talk myself out of that if it were found out, but the soldiers waved us past.

We had tea in the village, our minder proudly recounting when, why and how each man had become wanted for murder. They all stayed in the village during the summer when the army could move, going back to Hermel to spend winter with their families.

It was much too early in the year for butterflies at this level, so we set off in search of the inscriptions. They turned out to be a natural rock feature, so our hopes of archeological glory were dashed. Nearby, though, we saw Nebuchadnezzar's impressive stele, which says: "I cut through steep mountains, I split rocks, and thus I constructed for Marduk, my Lord, a straight road for the transport of the cedar . . . to carry mighty cedars, high and strong, of precious beauty and excellent dark quality, the abundant yield of Lebanon". Today remain – at least I very much hope they do – just a few bedraggled stands of Cedar.

On our way back, we discussed conditions with our bodyguard: "What would happen if we came here by ourselves to camp?" We would be perfectly safe. We would be honoured guests. No problem. I'm sure he was right. "But, then, why are you armed to the teeth?" "Ah. I have many enemies", after which he squeezed his ample torso out of the window of our orange VW-beetle to take pot-spots at the odd hare or two. An interesting concept in bodyguards!

I never managed to get back to Hermel. I would have loved to have done so. But you may now officially add *Zegrus eupheme* to the Lebanese checklist.– TORBEN B. LARSEN, 358 Coldharbour Lane, London SW9 9PL.

### **Two species of micro-moth new to the Isle of Wight**

Peter Cramp took an example of the Pyralid *Phlyctaenia perlucidalis* (Hübner) in his light trap at Godshill on 27 July 1995 and I recorded a specimen of *Anacamptis blattariella* (Hübner) at m.v. light at Freshwater on 22 July 1995. Neither of these species has been recorded from the Isle of Wight before.– S.A. KNILL-JONES, Roundstone, 2 School Green Road, Freshwater, Isle of Wight.

### **Contact wanted in Spain**

I would like to contact any lepidopterists who live in or around Valencia, Spain, to exchange notes and information.– G.B. STEVENS, Urb. Pla. de les Clotxes 11, Apt. de Correos 20, 46450 Benifayo, Valencia, Spain.